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For Immediate release - November 15, 2011

PATRICK-MURRAY ADMINISTRATION RENEWS REQUEST FOR DISASTER ASSISTANCE FOR MASSACHUSETTS FISHING INDUSTRY

BOSTON -- Tuesday, November 15, 2011 -- Governor Deval Patrick today sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Commerce John E. Bryson renewing the Commonwealth's request for \$21 million in federal fisheries disaster assistance for Massachusetts fishing communities impacted by the federal "catch shares" program. The Governor's request is accompanied by two new economic reports that document significant financial losses and dramatic consolidation in the Massachusetts-based groundfish fleet.

"Massachusetts fishermen have suffered severe economic hardship due to the implementation of the catch shares program," said Governor Patrick. "Under the federal program, we have seen a loss of jobs, vessels and businesses. I am requesting federal disaster assistance to mitigate these losses, and protect the economic viability of our historic fishing industry."

In November 2010, Governor Patrick made a request to the Department of Commerce asking for \$21 million in direct economic relief to the Massachusetts groundfish fleet for the impact caused by the transition to the catch shares system. The Administration's request was accompanied by a comprehensive Massachusetts Marine Fisheries Institute Report (MFI Report), which detailed the economic challenges Massachusetts fishermen have faced under catch shares.

The MFI Report estimated that fishermen would suffer \$21 million in lost revenue considering the difference between the value of groundfish allocated to fishermen in 2010 and the annual landings produced by the same fishermen in 2009. The Department of Commerce denied the Governor's request last January, but suggested that economic disaster aid could be available in the future, pending additional economic analysis.

In response to the Department of Commerce's request, the Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) issued *Comparative Economic Survey and Analysis of Northeast Fishery Sector 10* (Sector 10 Analysis), a new report that details losses in specific fishery sectors along the state's coastline. The in-depth analysis of Sector 10, comprised mostly of small boats fishing from the South Shore, documented a significant 61 percent decline in groundfish landings between 2009 (under the previous Days at Sea regulatory program), and 2010 under catch shares. This decline in landings has resulted in a 52 percent drop in groundfish revenue by 27 small business owners – equal to more than \$1.5 million. Furthermore, the Sector 10 Analysis shows 30 percent of permit holders have lost at least 80 percent of their groundfish revenue – worth \$301,000, while 52 percent lost at least half their revenue, worth \$667,000.

Additionally, DMF also compared the aggregate information for all sectors and common pool fishermen remaining in the Days at Sea management program, which shows that total revenues were down approximately \$11 million for 12 of the 17 sectors and the common pool.

A second just-completed report, the Break-Even Analysis of the New England Groundfish Fishery for FY2009 and FY2010 (Break-Even Analysis), confirms that the Massachusetts groundfish fleet has experienced a significant 24 percent decline between 2009 and 2010. The Break-Even Analysis was the result of a collaborative effort between DMF, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's School of Marine Science and Technology to further define economic impacts previously documented in the MFI Report to the Department of Commerce.

Finally, the recently released NOAA's 2010 Final Report on the Performance of the Northeast Multispecies (Groundfish) Fishery May 2010-April 2011 provides further evidence to support Massachusetts' original request in 2010. This report found that, for the full 2010 fishing year, 10 percent of vessels accounted for almost 58 percent of gross groundfish revenue, up significantly from the prior three years. The report further shows revenues have become consolidated in fewer individual vessels, that smaller boats are being forced out of business and many larger boats have been negatively affected.

Governor Patrick has partnered with congressional leaders, state legislators, city officials and industry representatives to address this challenge facing the industry.

"I'm hopeful the finish line is in sight," said U.S. Senator John Kerry. "After our field hearing, Administrator Lubchenco agreed to an expedited review of our new data which we believe is incontrovertible in making the case for the economic relief our fishermen desperately need. Secretary Bryson renewed his commitment to get up to Massachusetts and work with us. Governor Patrick and his team have been working closely with us to crack the code on the disaster declaration and I'm hopeful that today's new report gets us down to the short strokes of this process. It's absolutely vital for Massachusetts that we get our folks relief."

"NOAA's own data clearly shows what Massachusetts fishermen have been saying all along-- they are struggling to survive under the catch share program," said U.S. Senator Scott Brown. "I call on Secretary Bryson to swiftly approve Governor Patrick's request for a disaster declaration to provide some much needed relief to our fishermen."

"I appreciate the Governor making a follow-up request for disaster assistance to Secretary Bryson on behalf of groundfishermen," said Congressman Barney Frank. "The sector program has consolidated the fleet and placed too many fishermen and boat owners in a difficult financial situation. Without the proper financial assistance, many of these men and women will be forced to leave an industry which is at the very heart of our fishing communities. My colleagues and I will continue to fight on their behalf as well as for the many businesses which rely on their future success."

"In a time of consistently high unemployment and economic hardship, our first priority must continue to be bringing full and fair reparation to our harbors' small boat fleets for the damages amassed in the past year," said Congressman Bill Keating. "I thank Governor Patrick for his commitment to pursuing disaster aid funding for the fishermen of Massachusetts, and I thank the Sector 10 fishermen for their participation in this study. I will continue to work alongside my colleagues to ensure that this local industry is properly compensated."

"Maintaining a vibrant fishing industry and fisheries is integral to the economy and the spirit of Massachusetts," said Congressman Edward J. Markey. "The Commerce Department should look closely at this new economic data in evaluating the financial challenges facing some fishermen in our state."

"As the economic data and analysis continues to indicate, far too many of our fishing families are struggling to sustain their livelihood because of the catch-shares program," said Congressman John Tierney. "One of the ways Secretary Bryson can demonstrate a renewed commitment to helping our fishing community and treating them with fairness is by approving the Commonwealth's request for disaster assistance. I strongly supported the Governor's request last November, and I do so again this year."

"In Massachusetts and especially in my district, we have fisherman who are desperately trying to hold on to their boats, their houses and feed their families," said Senate President Therese Murray. "Our larger commercial fleets have been decimated and the science used to determine the catch is antiquated and inaccurate. This federal disaster assistance would serve as a positive and constructive step to help our fisherman maintain their livelihood and stop the erosion of a bedrock industry here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts."

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